

# THE ELEMENTARY ENGLISH REVIEW

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## Let Us Talk Together\*

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IT IS a pleasure for me to accept the Editor's kind invitation to a literary tea in these pages, and an informal discussion with teachers on the subjects nearest our hearts: that is, young folks and their reading. This is where I like best to be, in print or in person, with teachers and children's librarians, because we cherish the same aims and ideals and we speak the same language.

Because all my books for boys and girls of 'teen ages are adventure books, I want to present to you my personal opinion of the adventure story as a type of literature and as an emotional factor in shaping mind and character during those years which are probably the most impressionable years in a lifetime.

The adventure story is the oldest type of literature. It developed at the nomad's camp fire in prehistoric times. The first story tellers were men and women who recreated the stirring events of the day's march and the hunt in brief narratives that emphasized strength and daring and the delights of the great feast of wild game in which all the tribe shared no

matter who had made the kill. An Eskimo, living in a Stone Age culture, told the first white man he ever saw that the many brave stories in the oral literature of his people were invented to inspire courage and joy in a life that was hard and perilous and surrounded with mystery. Even so did the adventure story come to the lips of your prehistoric ancestors and mine; so was born the Art of Literature, the great Heartener of mankind. The form and moral content of the adventure story are the same today as before Time was. The form is a swift, direct narrative involving vigorous characters, who show the stuff of real life and normal psychology in them as they act their natural rôles in the plot of events. The moral content is that native idealism, not taught of God or man, which is as the marrow in human bones, inseparable from human life and being: courage, daring, joy (which is courage laughing), loyalty, the generous co-operation and sharing which expand into true kinship and brotherly love. These are not "lessons" inculcated in humanhood; *these are humanhood.*

The history of the American frontier is a true adventure story of this type.

The American frontier is the setting for seven of my ten books for boys and girls; two have the old Northwest of Canada for background; the other is set

\* This paper was prepared under the auspices of the Book Evaluation Committee of the Children's Librarians' Section of the American Library Association, Miss Vera J. Prout, chairman.

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on a South American frontier—*The Tiger Who Walks Alone*, which the Macmillan Company is re-issuing this year in a dollar edition.

Adventure stories just happened to me, in a literary way; I can't remember ever consciously choosing to write them. Why did they, and not other kinds of stories, capture me to be their scribe? If you will permit me, ladies and gentlemen, I shall be very personal for a few minutes. Those of you who prefer more intellectual discourse can take your tea cups and cookies into the next room. You, the tolerant and hardy souls, who have not been scared out of this corner where I sit and ramble on, will look over the pages of the first chapter in my *Beaver, Kings, and Cabins* (Macmillan), the story of the fur trade written for grown-ups as well as 'teens.

You meet there a small girl of six—you may guess her identity—who has the exciting experience of running dangerous rapids by night with her father's fur brigade. On a book shelf, within reach of me now, is the copy of *Alice Through the Looking Glass* which was stained by the churning, clayey river water when the boat she lay in almost capsized. At the tender age of six, then, literature and adventure got together in my mind! Their combined sway must have been potent, for I remember writing stories in a big copybook, with a big, broad carpenter's pencil my father gave me, lying on my tummy on a red blanket under the glistening balm-of-Gilead tree in the patch of garden between our log house and the much larger log trading house. When the lead wore down I trotted into the trading post among blanketed Indians—mostly red blankets like the rug of my outdoor studio—Canuck boatmen, and bales of beaver, mink, and foxes, to get my pencil sharpened. My father sat me up on the high counter, took out his jack-knife and whittled the pencil to another

point. Let commerce wait; Art must be served!

Because I was a voracious reader, I knew many words by the printed shapes of them without knowing what they meant. I used them freely in my writing. To me, they meant what I wanted to say. Imagine my dismay when my mother asked to read one of my stories and couldn't make head or tail of it! Weeping violently, I rushed to my father. He said he liked hearing stories better than reading them, and would I tell my story to him? I sobbed out the tale—I think it was about a little bear in the garden; there wasn't any little bear in our garden, of course. Then he asked me to write it over again for him just the way I had told it, and he helped me spell the simple words I used.

This was my first lesson in technique. Tell your story directly and simply so that anybody can understand it. My father had lived with Indians for years and he knew their swift, simple, dramatic method of telling stories. So he trained me to be a frontier story teller for boys and girls. Together, under the Indian influence, he and I went back in time to the dawn of our race and the camp fires of the Stone Age.

A book is only partly the author's creation; something of it flows in from the audience out there in a thousand schools, young folk who do not even know the book is being written for them. Writing is not writing if the words are not clear. A tale is not told until there is response. A spinner of adventure yarns cannot speak from an ivory tower. The dramatic, swift-moving tales about lively characters who exemplify courage, joy, loyalty, and a hardy brotherliness, are peculiarly the possession of American boys and girls, with the frontier days of the nation so close on their heels. Told in the setting of America's outdoors with flashes of Na-

# Writing Books for Boys and Girls\*

MARGERY BIANCO†

IT IS always of interest—and particularly so to a writer—to try to analyse just what it is that makes a story successful. I don't mean from the sales point of view, but in regard to the direct effect of the story itself.

We all know what we mean when we say that a story "rings true," but it isn't so easy to define. Some of the best stories seem just to have happened. There is that fortunate unity between idea and presentation that carries straight along from start to finish, making you feel as you read it that that particular story could not have been written or handled in any other way. It is like a wave that gathers, rises and breaks in perfect form and harmony. Unfortunately that kind of wave happens only too rarely. Very few stories come ready-made. They mean usually a good deal of building and planning, an infinite amount of selection and rejection, of getting together just those essential things that the author wants, and nothing else.

I don't feel that writing for children differs essentially from any other kind of writing. The choice of what one writes about may be different but once that is settled, your problems are pretty much the same. If there is a difference at all it lies largely in the approach, and perhaps a little in one's choice of language. That I do think should be made as simple and as natural as possible. As good prose as one can write, yes, but within the limits of plain ordinary everyday speech.

And that brings me to a point that I

would prefer to touch on a little later, but it does seem to belong right here. There is one great difference between a child's reading and that of an adult. Children, if they like a book at all, will read it over and over again. That applies to pretty well all ages. I happened to see not long ago a letter from a fourteen-year old girl, speaking of a book she had just received, and had read. She said: "I expect to read it over and over again this winter." She meant it. That is exactly what they do, and I think this could be very well borne in mind by those of us who write for young people. I hate to suggest any such expression as duty, or mission, in writing for children, because after all it is largely entertainment for us as well as for them, but I do think one owes them, if for this reason alone, an extra care—not only in regard to material and to truth—but also as regards English. Not literary writing, but clear thinking, clear expression, an avoidance of whatever is hackneyed or careless or slipshod. This does not entail stilted writing; quite the contrary. Simply the little extra care in craftsmanship which is worth while. For young children especially this is important, since they hear the same story read over and over, and with them it is actually a question of training the ear to the sounds of language. A sense of the rhythm of words, of simple balance and cadence, of the right choice of words and the living quality of a language, cannot be learned too early. Better one properly balanced sentence than a dozen little chopped-up ones, and no more difficult to follow. As for vocabu-

\* Read before the National Council of Teachers of English, Boston, November, 1936.

† Author of *Poor Cecco*, *Adventures of Andy*, *The Little Wooden Doll*, *All About Pets*, *The Street of Little Shops*, and others.

lary, I think even that can be simplified a great deal too far. One is apt to find, often, too much repetition of the same words, and not enough variety. I know that I am getting onto very risky ground here, but my defence is that I was brought up in those Spartan days when things were not made quite so easy for children as they are now, and when, if we did not recognize a word at first sight, or sound, we were at least credited with sufficient enterprise—or interest—to ask some older person what it meant. Oddly enough, it worked. Perhaps older people too, in those days, had a little more time, or patience, to answer small children's questions.

It so happens that I see a number of letters from children of all ages, about the different books they are reading, and why they like them. And nearly always they fall back on the same expression—"I like it because it is so *real*." That seems almost the first thing that they look for in a story, no matter what its background or period. And it confirms what I feel, that the thing which most concerns one in the writing of a children's story is its sense of reality. Does the whole thing seem alive—do the characters move and talk and act like real people? Are they going to seem alive to whoever reads the tale? That is the thing that matters most, far more than the plot or the subject—a great deal more than the actual writing. I put the characters first of all because they *are* the story, and whatever plot or movement there is has to arise from them. And if they don't interest you, nothing that they can possibly do is going to interest you, either.

For characters to be real, to have a genuine life of their own, you have to know them thoroughly. You have to know how they look, how they talk, down to their tone of voice and little turns of expression. They've got to have their feet solidly on the ground. Not for one in-

stant must they be types, vague personalities just floating around somewhere in your mind. Beware the minute that they do begin to float, to become vague and unreal to you, because that is the moment when your whole story may go to pieces in your hand, as it were, and there is nothing harder than to pick up the thread of a story that has lost life.

The same thing applies to background. If you are writing about a house, what sort of house is it? It's solid—it stands somewhere—it has rooms. You've got to know what those rooms are like, what is in them, where the doors and windows are, and the relation of one room to another. You ought to feel that you could find your way about it in the dark. You may think that it doesn't matter very much whether the parlor opens on the right of the entry or the left; perhaps it doesn't, but whichever side it is, it has got to stay that side, and you can't go changing it around afterwards in your mind. I don't know whether most writers have these difficulties about topography but I rather suspect they do, from some stories that I've read. I know that in writing *Winterbound*, in which a great deal of the action takes place in an old house in the country, I got completely stumped at one point in the story by the staircase. I knew just where it should be. It was an enclosed stairway, such as you very often find in New England houses of that type. It opened out of the living room, left of the fireplace. Sometimes when I mentally opened that door, there were the stairs all right. Other times by a sort of perversity it led straight into the pantry instead, and for the longest while that wandering staircase just kept me from getting on with the story at all. It worried me and continued to worry me until I finally got it straightened out and pinned down.

I don't mean by all this that detailed or over-accurate descriptions are at all necessary in a story; they aren't. But there



has to be a certain clearness in your own mind, a definite picture. Young people especially are very quick to notice discrepancies in a tale, the kind of discrepancies that probably wouldn't bother an adult reader at all. They live the story through very intensely in their imagination. Any tale is in a way an illusion of reality, and a little slip that the writer may make is a sort of mental jolt—it disturbs the whole current of thought.

Of course in writing purely imaginative tales there is a much freer hand, so to speak, but even here there is a kind of logic that must be considered. That is, if you want the story to be convincing, and the first requirement of a fantastic tale is that it should convince you, otherwise it has no excuse. It has to be consistent within its own bounds. If you remember *Floating Island*,<sup>1</sup> one of the most delightful fantasies that was ever written, you will recall that not once did those dolls step out of their true doll character, and that the great beauty of that story was the way it was built up around the fascinating speculation as to how ordinary-sized things would appear to very small beings. When I think of *Floating Island* I always remember particularly the part where one of the doll family—I think it is the servant doll—wakes up in the morning inside a large tropical blossom where she had crawled for shelter overnight during the storm, and exactly how those enormous petal walls looked to her. Very much, I suppose as they might look to a bee.

In writing a real life story I think it should be real life, as far as one can present it. It should have a definite relation to life, as boys and girls themselves know it. Things shouldn't be made any easier than they actually are. Stories where everything comes right as by magic, where each difficulty is promptly surmounted and something always turns up

in time to save a situation, are not really playing fair to the reader. Children know much better. They know that things don't happen just that way, and that if you really want to accomplish anything at all—no matter how small—you generally have to work pretty darn hard over it, and go through a lot of misgivings and discouragement along the way. Life isn't just a succession of wonderful good times, and the kind of story that accentuates the good times and soars happily over the difficulties makes a one-sided picture. It comes from an attempt to write the kind of story that one supposes a growing boy or girl would like, from an over-desire to please and entertain, instead of just going ahead and writing your story the way it would naturally happen; and that is, I think, a mistake. Children themselves are not so continually preoccupied with parties and picnics as one might suppose. And somehow these descriptions of good times usually seem to fall a little flat. It is really much easier to be interested in other people's problems and worries and disappointments than it is in their good times—certainly they are more likely to provide variety. Life would really be a rather dull affair if everything one did turned out right, if every garden grew a record crop and everyone's quilt or chocolate cake took first prize at the fair.

I think there is one pretty safe rule in writing for children, and that is to write about what interests yourself, for those are the only things it is possible to write about with any real conviction. Not to think so much about your audience, not to worry about what they may or may not like as imagined from the adult point of view. One can trust pretty much to their judgment in liking and wanting what is *genuine*. If a story really holds your own interest while you are writing it, if it concerns anything about which you do feel strongly, a subject upon which you have got something to say, some place

<sup>1</sup> By Anne Parrish. Harper.

or background that you know intimately and characters among whom you feel yourself really at home, then it will interest your readers too. But if your own interest in the tale lags, or isn't properly there to begin with, then they know it. And they aren't to be fooled by optimistic cheeriness or any subterfuge of that kind. And they don't want you to be all children together, so to speak. They much prefer you to be yourself.

Just what does make a story? It may be just some trivial happening that starts the whole idea in your mind, one of those fleeting recollections of mood or feeling that come back to one for no special reason. Some experience that you want to share, some sensation that you want to catch and set down. Maybe when the story is finished it will turn out to be something quite different, that seems to have very little actual connection with whatever first started it, but still that certain thing—that little spark that struck fire for just a second, perhaps—will be there, consciously or not, and it will be that which gives the life and reality to the tale.

Pictures and stories take shape very easily in one's mind—the hard part is when you try to get them pinned down. But I do think on the whole that the easier a story is to write, the more likely it is to be good. There are always snags, but snags usually mean either that you are trying to put something into the tale that doesn't belong there, or that you are shifting somehow into a wrong track or a wrong mood.

I suppose that most writing is in a sense a kind of vivid remembering, a remembering of mood, of feeling, of impression. It

is particularly true of writing for children, because that does entail the capacity of putting oneself back in time, of trying to recapture something of what one felt and experienced at a certain age. It is this kind of remembering which gives us the sheer whole hearted sense of the joy of living in *Roller Skates*,<sup>2</sup> a book that carries one back to the actual sensations of ten years old, stirring up a whole host of recollections that most of us had forgotten completely about. It has given us *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*,<sup>3</sup> *Penelope Ellen*,<sup>4</sup> the fine vivid background that makes Constance Lindsay Skinner's stories of the Hudson Bay territory so definitely alive. Books like *The Little House on the Prairie*,<sup>5</sup> admirable because it is such a completely well-rounded picture of a family, one of the few children's books I know in which the parents have a really important part in the story and are not just background figures. Parents are the weak point in so many books—they have to be there but a writer seldom knows just what to do with them. Usually their function is to make brief appearances from time to time, but here they are the actual bone and sinew of the story—Pa Wilder especially. Happy are those writers who have this richness of background and early experience to draw upon, and can remember it with the intensity that makes their books alive. The rest of us must do as best we can, with a scrap here, a scrap there, lucky if we can piece together something that will give to others, and to ourselves in the writing of it, some echo of the reality of youth.

<sup>2</sup> By Ruth Sawyer. Viking.

<sup>3</sup> By Kate Douglas Wiggin. Houghton Mifflin.

<sup>4</sup> By Ethel Parten. Viking.

<sup>5</sup> By Laura Wilder. Harper.

# Susan Warner and "The Wide, Wide World"

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JO SPENT the morning on the river with Laurie, and the afternoon reading and crying over *The Wide, Wide World* up in an apple tree," wrote Miss Alcott in *Little Women*. Jo was only one among thousands of girls who read and wept over the trials of the heroine, for *The Wide, Wide World* ranked next to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a best seller in nineteenth century America.

Susan Warner, who wrote under her great-grandmother's name of Elizabeth Wetherell, was as melancholy as her heroines. She lived in a day when weeping was about the only outlet for conflicting emotions vouchsafed to a woman of gentle breeding.

Perhaps she had a right to weep, for there were unusual difficulties attending Miss Warner's childhood. Because she was precocious she felt them keenly. When she and her sister Anna were very small, their mother died. The mother had been the strong member of the household and their kind but ineffectual father gradually lost his law practice and his property. The girls were placed in the home of their Aunt Fanny in Caanan, New York, when their mother died and there were surrounded by the comforts which at first their father was able to provide for them. As his fortunes declined they were forced to retire to what had been their dearly loved summer home on Constitution Island in the Hudson, now a part of West Point.

A part of the old house had been one end of the fort which guarded the island during the American Revolution. A heavy

chain had stretched between Constitution Island and West Point to prevent the passage of British ships on the river. There was a story still current when the Warners moved there that related how Benedict Arnold had removed a link of this chain as a part of his nefarious scheme for giving West Point over to the enemy.

Thick brush covered the island. The sisters found that by cutting it they could provide both exercise and firewood. The neighbors were amazed to see women at such work and rumors spread that the Warners could cut down a great tree with a few blows of an ax. These stories were annoying but the sisters continued to cut brush and row their heavy boat while their father made spasmodic efforts to establish a law practice in New York City.

It became necessary to part with most of the family treasures to provide money for household expenses. One of the last pieces of treasured silver was sold to buy an overcoat for the father. He was involved in endless lawsuits with his neighbors on the island and what little money he earned went for court fees.

During this trying period the daughters earned small sums of money by coloring Bible text cards and correcting compositions for a girls' school in New York whose head mistress was their friend.

In 1848, when Susan Warner was twenty-nine years old, matters had reached such a pass that it seemed they must lose their home. While they were washing dishes one lonely night Aunt Fanny suggested to Susan that she write

a book as a means of earning money. Before the dishes were finished the plan of the book was made.

Days of laborious writing followed. The pile of carefully penned pages grew rapidly as Miss Warner followed the fortunes of her heroine, Ellen, through a life of persecution because of her religious principles. The rural scenes and customs of the Caanan of her childhood came to life in the writing. Between the scoldings of the unsympathetic aunt and the bathos of deathbed scenes, Miss Warner permitted Ellen to be, on occasion, even mildly flirtatious.

When the book was finished the Warners felt sure that their fortune was made. The proud father carried the manuscript to publisher after publisher without eliciting a spark of interest. Harpers kept the book for some weeks and then returned it to the author with the single word, "Fudge," written across the first page. Finally every major publishing company but Putnam's had seen the book. Mr. Putnam somewhat doubtfully agreed to look at the manuscript when Mr. Warner brought it to him.

The publisher took the manuscript home with him and gave it to his mother who was visiting him at the time. "Read this, mother, and tell me what you think of it," he said.

The next day the mother was observed in tears over the manuscript and when she finished it she said firmly to her son, "Publish this if you never publish another book." So a letter was written asking Miss Warner to call to arrange for the details of publication. That the publisher was still not sure of the value of the work may be gathered from a remark he made to a friend, "I am not sure but that I have made a mistake in accepting it."

The printing and proofreading took a long time. The Putnams invited Miss Warner to be a guest in their home while she read proof. In this way a friendship

was begun that lasted throughout her life.

It was 1850 when *The Wide, Wide World* appeared. Its success was almost instantaneous. To Mr. Putnam's surprise and delight the first edition was soon exhausted as were subsequent printings. The book was printed in England and translated into German and French. However from these foreign printings there came little pecuniary reward to the author due to the lax copyright laws of the time.

The home on Martlaer's Rock was saved and the rest of the island purchased. (The Warners always called their property by its earlier Dutch name although this was no longer official.) Comforts such as the sisters had not known for years were now theirs. They took delight in providing small luxuries for the father and their Aunt Fanny, now almost blind and confined to a wheel chair.

The new release from poverty permitted the hiring of a servant so that the sisters might be free to write. It was a great stroke of fortune that brought colored Bertha and her husband Buckner to the island, for they watched over and loved the members of the Warner household until the last one had passed away.

Susan Warner began at once on another book which she called *Queechy*. It appeared two years after *The Wide, Wide World* and shared, though it never equalled, its success.

The worst was over for the brave women who had faced life with such rare courage. There was leisure now in the long evenings when the wood fire crackled on the hearth. There were friends, too, to share the pleasant house and praise Bertha's faultless cooking. Catherine Maria Sedgwick, Alice and Phoebe Cary, Julia Ward Howe, the Putnams, and the family of Cyrus W. Field brought their rare gifts of friendship and the comfort of their presence.

It became increasingly difficult to find



time to write. The sisters learned that by continuing the habits of their days of poverty they could command a quiet time before friends and callers shared their day. They rose at 4:30 and after a cup of tea and slice of bread and butter they were soon hard at work. The work of both of them appeared in many of the papers and journals published for children. All of it was written by the fire of the early morning in winter, or under a tent in the garden where they worked in summer.

It was Buckner's pride to row the sisters to the mainland for visits and shopping, but their rambles around the island were made with a fat pony and a three-wheeled chaise, unusual even at the time.

Probably the greatest happiness that came to Susan and Anna Warner was their association with the cadets of West Point. For many years they conducted at their home a Bible class to which forty young men came each Sunday. Promptly at the appointed hour each week those who had been fortunate enough to obtain the coveted passes came in Buckner's boat to the friendly old house where Miss Susan and Miss Anna, looking like prints from Godey's in their wide skirts and Paisley shawls, welcomed them. Miss Susan, seated in her easy chair by the fire talked of duty, the love of God and the joys of Christian service.

After the talk, the smiling Bertha came in with a great tea tray and plates of fresh gingerbread whose fragrance mingled with that of the verbenas and geraniums in the small greenhouse opening from the living room. In summer the group sat about Miss Susan's chair on the lawn and talked and laughed while they ate Bertha's pound cake and the crisp raspberries from the garden.

Perhaps the cynic might suggest that the delicious food and the fact that the Warner home was the only place to which passes were given on Sunday might have

been the reason for the interest of the cadets. Ample proof exists that such was not the case. The living room contained many gifts sent from all over the world by the men who remembered gratefully the happy hours spent there. Until her death each sister corresponded with dozens of the boys who still sought advice or comfort.

One of the family treasures in the Warner home was a Gilbert Stuart portrait of Washington. During the days of their greatest poverty it was suggested that they sell it. Miss Susan replied that they intended to give it to West Point where their uncle had been chaplain for many years and that they could not think of parting with it in any other way. The gift was made after Miss Anna's death in accordance with this wish.

Susan Warner died on March 17, 1885. By special permission of the Secretary of War, her body was buried at West Point and she had a military funeral. The cadets were in charge and they carried their friend tenderly to her last resting place.

There were no flowers at the funeral. Both sisters were genuine lovers of growing flowers but they did not like to uproot them for display. They had used their island as a place to preserve the wild flowers which were disappearing from America.

On Miss Susan Warner's grave stone at West Point is cut:

Susan Warner  
In Peace in Christ

The Author of *The Wide, Wide World* was  
Born July 11, 1819  
and passed gently into the life that knows no ending  
March 17, 1885

"And this is life eternal, that they  
might know thee, the only true God,  
and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.  
John 17:3  
Praise God the Shepherd is so sweet  
Praise God the country is so fair  
We could not keep them from his feet  
We can but haste to meet them there."

*Auf Wiedersehen*

# Children's Choices in Poetry in the First Grade

RUTH E. BRADSHAW

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**D**URING THE school year 1935-1936 the writer of this article engaged in a rather extensive study of the choices of children on the first grade level in poetry. The literature dealing with children's choices reveals that a good many studies have been made during the past decade, notably those of Huber, Bruner, and Currey (1),<sup>1</sup> Mackintosh (2, 3), McGuire (4), and Eckert (5), but none of them dealt exclusively with the direct choices of first grade children.

This particular study was carried out under the direction of Dr. Ernest Horn of the State University of Iowa in twenty-six first grades of representative towns of Iowa and Illinois, and it includes the individual choices of more than five hundred children. In preparation for it the writer examined eighteen sets of school readers (primer, first, second, and third readers), four lists derived from previous research by individuals or small groups, eight courses of study in widely scattered areas of the United States, and six anthologies of children's poetry.

The one conclusive bit of evidence gleaned from this examination is that there is practically no agreement among the authorities who select poems for first grade children. Poems are for the most part omitted entirely from modern primers and first grade readers. Some of those now in second readers were formerly in first readers; many courses of study still

contain almost exclusively poems by the older poets, but the new readers include much modern material. James Tippet, Eleanor Farjeon, Annette Wynne, and Marjorie Seymour Watts are examples of those included in books, but not in courses of study. The new readers reflect quite noticeably the influence of the criticism launched against courses of study and readers by such studies as those mentioned previously. Courses of study examined reflected the influence of recent anthologies, *The Posy Ring*, for example, but they lag behind the readers in including new poets for reasons that are perhaps too evident to mention here.

There appears to be very little agreement, either in courses of study or readers, as to the exact grade placement of most of the poetry. Poems listed for the first grade in some courses are to be found in second or third in others. For example, "My Shadow," by Stevenson, is found in three of the courses of study for first grade and in six for second; "Bed in Summer" is in four for first and four for second; "The Wind" is in three first and three second; "The Moon's the North Wind's Cooky" is in three first and three second; and "The Sugar Plum Tree" is in two first and three second. Some are found consistently in courses of study and lists and not in readers, and vice versa.

Courses of study include practically no humorous poems. One might infer that primary children do not like humorous poetry were not humor mentioned among

<sup>1</sup> Parenthetical numbers refer to titles in the bibliography, page 188.

the elements of greatest popularity by competent critics of children's poetry. An assumption that may be more nearly the fact is that adults do not know as yet what little children think is funny. Another equally reasonable assumption is that courses of study still reflect to some extent the old formal idea of education—that it is serious business wherein laughter upsets the order and is to be avoided.

A study of recent discussions by authorities in the field of criticism of poetry for little children revealed a wide range of interest, but very few of them tell definitely what children of any given age level like. One (6) says that children in grade one like animalness and play, those in grade two prefer lullabies, and those in grade three like outdoors and fairies. Another (7) mentions that the following elements should be represented in courses for primary children: a rhythmic singing quality; the imaginative and fanciful; familiar experiences; the whimsical quality of sheer nonsense; the play spirit; a touch of mystery; an appeal to the constructive emotions; vicarious experience; the suggestion of motor activity. If we follow Walter Barnes's principles of selection as he records them in his articles in this journal (8), we shall eliminate: the retrospective or the "Little Boy Blue" type; the "cute, darling" poetry, written *about* children from an adult point of view, not *for* them (little children are neither cute nor darling to each other); the philosophical attempts to understand life, death, frustrations of existence; and all the inane babyish stuff described so adequately by Miss Brown in her recent article (9). "Great poetry for children must deal greatly with children's experiences," says Dr. Barnes.

Alice Dalgliesh (10) writes: "Almost every child enjoys rhyme and rhythm. Very little children respond to the lilt and swing of rhymes, the vocabulary of which is quite beyond their comprehension. . . .

Poetry should be a joyous and spontaneous thing. There are many different kinds of poems and not all have the same type of appeal. We use some poems because they fit an experience or mood. We use some because of the rhyme or jingle and not because they hold any special meaning for the children. . . . Then there are story-telling poems such as 'Little Bo-peep.' . . . There are poems we enjoy especially because of rhythm, Lear's 'The Owl and the Pussy Cat.'" Miss Dalgliesh classifies poems not under rhythm, rhyme, etc., particularly, but under poets who write well on particular subjects.

Annie E. Moore (11) says: "There is a prevalent notion, sometimes stated as a fact, that children do not like poetry. Such an opinion is not justified by any investigations which have so far been made, and it goes counter to the common experiences of multitudes of competent witnesses. The strongest statement which can be backed up by research is that under particular school procedures groups of children at specific age levels did not like certain poems which were read to them as well as they like certain stories in prose. Genuine esthetic pleasure is such a subtle thing that it cannot be measured quantitatively and *en masse* by any means as yet devised, for there are potent factors in a child's background and in the immediate situations which seem to defy capture and analysis. . . ."

Miss Moore continues that there are five natural bents of children which, if encouraged, incline them toward poetry. They are: "(1) Responsive to rhythm as shown by the way they are swayed by every measured movement. Metrical verse stimulates this pleasurable response almost as much as music does. (2) They delight in sounds of words and all kinds of language effects. Such effects are the very essence of all kinds of poetry. (3) Their keen and alert senses are very busy building up conceptions of a tangible

world. Poetry recognizes and appeals to the senses beyond any other kind of literature. . . . (4) The fresh and active imaginations of children enable them to see beauty and to feel wonder and delight in experiences which are regarded as commonplace by most of their elders. . . . (5) Children are eager participants in nature experiences, and they exhibit very keen interest in living things. Nature in its various forms is the subject of much simple, beautiful poetry. . . ."

"Interests in poetry peculiar to children occupy a large place in verse written for them—pets, toys, plays, sport, school life, youthful adventures, vagrant fancy, fairies, small joys, and sorrows find lyric celebration." (11)

### *The Experimental Procedure*

After careful examination of the sources already mentioned as well as several other more recent anthologies, a list of 215 poems was compiled. This list was narrowed to 100 and submitted to Miss Mabel Snedaker, Instructor in Children's Literature at the University of Iowa, for her approval. When the several plans of procedure which had been suggested as possible ones for an experiment of this sort with little children had been tried, this list was found to be too bulky and so was further cut to a final group of sixty, divided into the following six classes merely for convenience: (I) singing quality and rhythm, (II) about animals and nature, (III) about childhood activities and interests, (IV) rhymes and jingles, old and new, (V) humorous poems, (VI) imaginative and fanciful.

GROUP I—SINGING QUALITY AND RHYTHM—The Cradle Hymn—Luther, The Swing—Stevenson, Sleep Baby Sleep—German, The Brown Thrush—Larcom, What Does Little Birdie Say?—Tennyson, The Sleepy Song—Bacon, Only One Mother—Cooper, Kentucky Babe—Buck, A Frog Went A-Wooing—Horn, The Wind—Stevenson.

GROUP II—ANIMALS AND NATURE—The Rabbit—E. King, The Woodpecker—Roberts, Sunning—

Tippett, Little Snail—H. Conkling, The Cow—J. Taylor, Who Has Seen the Wind?—Rossetti, Boats Sail on the River—Rossetti, The Worm—Roberts, Frogs at School—Cooper, The First Friend—Kipling.

GROUP III—CHILDHOOD ACTIVITIES AND INTERESTS—The Bear Hunt—M. Widdemer, The Drum—E. Field, Bed in Summer—Stevenson, Milking Time—Roberts, A Good Play—Stevenson, Animal Crackers—Morley, My Shadow—Stevenson, Little—D. Aldis, What I Like—Seegmiller, The Star—Taylor.

GROUP IV—RHYMES AND JINGLES—The Queen of Hearts—Mother Goose, Grasshopper Green—Mother Goose, Little Boy Blue—Mother Goose, Little Bo-Peep—Mother Goose, Baa Baa Black Sheep—Mother Goose, Taxicabs—Tippett, Mary Had a Little Lamb—Hall, The House Cat—A. Wynne, The Old Woman—Chinese Mother Goose, A Birdie With a Yellow Bill—Stevenson.

GROUP V—HUMOROUS POEMS—Robin Red Breast—Mother Goose, The Owl and the Pussy Cat—Lear, Furry Bear—A. Milne (by special permission), The Three Foxes—A. Milne (by special permission), The Monkeys and the Crocodile—Richards, Jippy and Jimmy—Richards, Nicholas Ned—Richards, The Little Turtle—Lindsay, A Farmer Went Riding—Old Rhyme, The Hop Toad and The Rabbit—J. Martin.

GROUP VI—IMAGINATIVE AND FANCIFUL—Please—R. Fyleman, Someone—W. De la Mare, Once When You Were Walking—A. Wynne, The Little Elf—J. E. Bangs, The Sugar Plum Tree—E. Field, Have You Watched the Fairies?—H. Fyleman, The Elf and the Dormouse—O. Herford, The New Moon—E. Follen, The Moon's the North Wind's Cooky—V. Lindsay, Almost—R. Field.

Of course it goes without saying that children's poetry cannot be put into any very well defined classes. Some of these poems might have well been classed in several of the above groups, and in the original study (12) of which this is a report, the poems were reclassified.

From the experiment several questions were answered concerning the choices of the children and teachers from the poems in this particular group. These questions will be considered briefly as follows:

1. Do first grade children like poetry?
2. Do teachers' choices affect children's choices?
3. Can teachers predict the choices that children will make?



4. Which of the poems in the entire list do the children prefer?
5. What type of poems do the children prefer?
6. Does familiarity have a noticeable effect upon choices of the children?
7. Do boys and girls differ in their choices?

Detailed answers to these questions with accompanying tables may be found in the study mentioned. A brief résumé is given here.

1. Do first grade children like poetry? More than 50 per cent of the children in the group who were asked specifically, "Do you like this poem?" liked every single one. Eighty per cent of the children liked forty-five of them. Surely one is justified in saying that these first grade children like poetry. The table following shows the percentage of children who liked each poem.

TABLE I  
CHILDREN'S CHOICES, AND TEACHERS' CHOICES

	Children liking poems	Teachers liking poems
	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
* 1. Little Bo-Peep	96.57	66.9
2. The Cradle Hymn	95.	82.6
* 3. Baa Baa Black Sheep	95.	82.6
* 4. The Three Foxes	94.16	60.8
5. Animal Crackers	93.34	78.3
* 6. The Frogs at School	93.33	56.5
* 7. The Woodpecker	91.66	82.6
* 8. Robin Redbreast	91.66	65.2
9. The Little Elf	90.83	91.3
* 10. Furry Bear	90.00	66.9
* 11. The Monkeys and the Crocodile	90.	52.1
* 12. Jippy and Jimmy	90.	60.8
13. Someone	90.	66.9
* 14. The Queen of Hearts	90.	56.5
* 15. Little	90.	30.4
16. My Shadow	90.	91.3
17. Bed in Summer	90.	82.6
* 18. Mary Had a Little Lamb	89.17	73.4
19. What Does Little Birdie Say?	89.17	82.6
* 20. Time to Rise	89.17	73.4

	Children liking poems	Teachers liking poems
	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
21. Have You Watched the Fairies?	89.16	65.2
* 22. Sleep Baby Sleep	89.16	69.8
23. The Star	89.16	60.8
* 24. The Bear Hunt	88.34	66.9
* 25. The Old Woman	88.33	56.5
26. Once When You Were Walking	87.50	73.4
* 27. A Farmer Went Riding	87.50	34.7
* 28. Milking Time	86.67	43.4
29. A Good Play	86.67	65.2
30. The Little Turtle	86.67	86.9
* 31. Grasshopper Green	85.83	60.8
* 32. The Owl and the Pussy Cat	85.83	39.1
33. The Swing	85.80	86.9
* 34. The Sleepy Song	85.	30.4
* 35. The House Cat	83.33	56.5
* 36. Sunning	83.33	47.8
* 37. A Frog Went A-Wooing	82.50	34.7
* 38. The First Friend	82.50	52.1
* 39. The Moon's The North Wind's Cooky	82.50	66.9
* 40. The Sugar Plum Tree	82.50	56.5
* 41. The Rabbit	80.87	47.8
* 42. The Drum	80.83	60.8
43. The Elf and the Dormouse	80.83	65.2
* 44. The New Moon	80.	66.9
45. Please	80.	73.4
* 46. Nicholas Ned	80.	43.4
* 47. The Worm	79.17	39.1
* 48. The Brown Thrush	79.17	56.5
49. The Wind	78.33	82.6
* 50. Only One Mother	77.50	30.4
51. Boats Sail on the River	76.67	82.6
* 52. What I Like	76.66	78.3
* 53. The Little Snail	76.66	34.7
* 54. Kentucky Babe	74.17	30.4
55. Who Has Seen the Wind?	74.17	86.9
* 56. Taxicabs	74.16	34.7
57. The Cow	74.16	60.8
* 58. The Hop Toad and the Rabbit	70.83	52.1
* 59. Little Boy Blue	68.33	78.3
* 60. Almost	68.33	60.8

\* Starred poems were judged unworthy to be called "poems" by from one to seven of the teachers voting.

From this table one gets a rough estimate of the general type of poems that the children prefer. In the first quartile

are found four funny poems, four rhymes and jingles, two expressing child philosophy, two about animals, two fanciful ones, and one chosen for its melody. In the fourth quartile there are four from those classified as expressing melody and rhythm, five about animals and nature, two funny ones, and one each from the child philosophy and fanciful groups. These results are contradictory to those obtained when groups of paired poems were presented to other groups of children.

2. Do teachers' choices affect children's choices? The teachers in this particular group voted quite consistently for the older poems and those common to courses of study when they stated their own choices. The second column of Table I shows quite clearly that there was very little agreement between the poems the teachers liked and those that the children liked. These results are quite contradictory to those reached by Miss Feasey (13) in her research. She decided that teachers were a very important factor in children's choices. It more nearly agrees with the findings of Miss Mackintosh (3)—that correlations between teachers' ratings and children's ratings are low. When the results are shown graphically upon a scatter diagram they show a slight positive correlation. From the results of the teachers' votes for the poems they themselves liked, one can conclude that these particular teachers are not exceedingly fond of the poetry that is to be found in first grade sources.

Just out of curiosity the writer asked the teachers to designate any selection in the group of sixty which they considered not worth calling poetry. The results were most interesting and not a little surprising. Forty-one of the sixty poems were judged unworthy by from one to seven of the teachers. "Nicholas Ned" and "A Frog Went A-Wooing" were high scorers as worthless, but the one selection, "The Hoptoad and the Rabbit" which was in-

cluded, although in the estimation of the writer and at least one excellent judge of poetry for little children, it was considered as mere doggerel, was counted unworthy by only three of these teachers. Another interesting thing about this record is the number of humorous poems which were included. It is not safe to say any more than this concerning quality in poetry, for the whole significance lies in the definition of poetry which a judge recognizes. One can conceive of a definition that would exclude all the rhymes and jingles and all the humorous poems in this group, but it is a little difficult to conceive of one which would cover the entire forty-one poems. One conclusion seems particularly justifiable. Children are no respecters of teachers' judgments or of definitions of poetry. They like certain selections regardless of whether they are good poetry or not. This is contradictory to one modern author's statement that children instinctively turn to the good poetry and dislike the poor.

3. Can teachers predict the choices that children will make? Yes and no. It appears to be good prediction in the case of some poems and very poor prediction in the case of others. For example, in the case of the poems liked by 90 per cent of the children the teachers' predictions ranged from 95.6 to 52.1, while in the case of the poems falling in the lowest quartile, the range of the teachers' predictions was from 91.6 to 39.1, with 91.3 per cent voting that the children would like the poem that stands next to the last in the list.

4. Which of the poems in the entire list of sixty do the children prefer? Although every poem in the group was not paired with every other one, a composite of the ranks each one received when it was paired with nineteen others gives a rough picture of which the children might prefer had there been time and sufficient numbers of children available to make such pairing possible. The results of the

comparisons are shown on the following table.

TABLE II  
RANKS OF POEMS WHEN COMPARED WITH  
NINETEEN OTHER POEMS

	No. of 1st ranks	Per cent rank
1. A Farmer Went Riding	312	75.2
2. A Frog Went A-Wooing	305	73.4
3. The Monkeys and the Crocodile	303	73.0
4. The Three Foxes	300	72.2
5. The Cradle Hymn	284	68.4
6. Animal Crackers	275	66.2
7. The Cow	272	65.5
8. The Drum	265	63.1
9. The Frogs at School	261	62.8
10. The Sugar Plum Tree	260	62.6
11. Jippy and Jimmy	259	62.4
12. The Old Woman	258	62.1
13. The Elf and the Dormouse	257	61.4
14. Kentucky Babe	251	60.4
15. The Rabbit	248	59.7
16. Mary Had a Little Lamb	246	59.2
17. The Woodpecker	243	58.5
18. Furry Bear	243	58.5
19. The Bear Hunt	243	58.5
20. The Owl and the Pussy Cat	234	56.3
21. The Star	232	55.9
22. Have You Watched the Fairies?	229	55.1
23. Robin Redbreast	227	54.7
24. What Does Little Birdie Say?	219	52.7
25. Sleep Baby Sleep	219	52.7
26. Once When You Were Walking	212	51.0
27. Little Boy Blue	207	41.8
28. The First Friend	202	48.9
29. A Good Play	201	48.4
30. Little Bo-Peep	199	47.9
31. Nicholas Ned	199	47.9
32. The Little Turtle	198	47.7
33. Sunning	198	47.7
34. My Shadow	195	46.7
35. The New Moon	193	46.5
36. The Little Elf	192	46.2
37. Grasshopper Green	191	46.
38. The Queen of Hearts	187	45.0
39. Milking Time	186	44.8
40. Bed in Summer	183	44.1
41. The Sleepy Song	182	43.8
42. The Swing	180	43.3
43. Taxicabs	180	43.3
44. Time to Rise	180	43.3
45. The Brown Thrush	179	43.1
46. What I Like	178	42.8

	No. of 1st ranks	Per cent rank
47. Only One Mother	178	42.8
48. Someone	176	42.4
49. The Hop Toad and the Rabbit	174	41.9
50. The Snail	173	41.6
51. The Moon's the North Wind's Cooky	161	38.8
52. Boats Sail on the River	160	38.5
53. The Worm	160	38.5
54. Baa Baa Black Sheep	157	37.8
55. The House Cat	155	37.3
56. Little	154	37.1
57. Please	150	36.1
58. The Wind	140	33.7
59. Almost	107	25.7
60. Who Has Seen the Wind?	71	17.1

The table is based upon the choices of 415 children, 186 voting on poems paired by types and 229 voting on those paired with the others in their own group. The scores are the sums of the number of times each poem ranked first, divided by the number of children ranking it. For example, the first poem, "A Farmer Went Riding," received 312 first ranks. That number divided by 415, or the number of children ranking it, gives the per cent score of 75.2.

When one tries to discover from these tables whether children are most interested in poems found in representative courses of study, in lists obtained from research in the field, in the very old or the very new, he finds himself in difficulty. For example, they like very well "The Cradle Hymn," "Animal Crackers," "Robin Redbreast," "Mary Had a Little Lamb," "The Three Foxes," "A Frog Went A-Wooing," "The Drum," which are all old except two. On the other hand, they appear to like least "The Brown Thrush," "The Moon's The North Wind's Cooky," "The Wind," "The Little Snail," "Almost," and "The Worm," of which two are old and the others new. One of these, "The Worm," was chosen because it was found in no list, course, or anthology, but in a recent discussion of what children like in modern poetry as

one which is very popular. It does not appear that one can definitely say that children like the poems found in one source better than those in another. Poems in the modern courses of study for the most part appear to be taken from the lists. Some of the new poetry is more popular with the children than some of the old and vice versa. Children like or do not like poems regardless of their rank or station.

Essentially this same statement may be made concerning poets. Robert Louis Stevenson, who critics, judges, and investigators have said ranks first with children, ranked fairly high in this study, but never first, and fairly low, but never last. Christina Rossetti did not rank high at any time. However, more experimentation must be done before the writer of this article should care to say that either is popular or unpopular with children in the first grade. She hopes to carry this experiment further during the coming school year. The results of this study indicate that with respect to poets, as in the case of the old and new poems, children are no respecters of individuals at all. They like poems because they like them, not because Christina Rossetti or Robert Louis Stevenson or some other poet wrote them.

5. What type of poems do the children prefer? When the poems were paired by types, type I ranked first when it was paired with types II, IV, and VI; type II ranked first when it was paired with type IV only; type III ranked first when it was paired with each other type except V; type IV ranked second when it was paired with each other type; type V ranked first throughout; and type VI ranked first when ranked with types II and IV. These rankings are based upon the choices of 186 children.

It will be noted that the funny poems are all except one about animals. A different classification, as has been said, would yield different results. Therefore

the findings recorded here are not to be taken as conclusive.

The writer tried to check these results with those of previous investigations mentioned earlier, but found difficulty in drawing any conclusions for the reason that careful analysis of those findings reveals that children are said to like all poems for all sorts of reasons ranging from emotional appeal to rhyme, with action, stimulation of thought or imagination, dramatic appeal, familiar experience, and environment falling between the extremes. One might well ask how such adult-sounding reasons were obtained from children. On the other hand the one investigation that has very wide influence upon modern courses of study—that of Huber, Bruner, and Curry—narrows the choices of first graders down to animalness and play. The findings of this study would add evidence to the popularity of play, and it so happens that although Group II, animals and nature, ranked close to the last, the animal poems ranked first when compared within the group, and eight out of the first quartile when poems were paired with others, both of their own groups and others, were about animals.

It is interesting to note that rhymes and jingles which made up the bulk of poetry in primers and first grade readers until poetry was practically eliminated from them, ranked last in the list, while funny poems, those which several of the teachers taking part in this experiment ranked as no good, came out on top.

6. Does familiarity have any effect upon the choices? Writers and teachers have stated many times that children like poems with which they are familiar. Two of the teachers in this group stated that their children enjoyed very much those poems with which they were familiar, but no teacher made mention of those that the children had not heard. A great many of the children did like the unfamiliar



poems. In the case of 38 poems, or 66.33 per cent, the number of children who had not heard them before and liked them was greater than the number who had heard them before and liked them. And 51.66 per cent of the poems which had not been heard before were liked. This seems to indicate that familiarity may not have very great effect upon first grade children's choices.

On the other hand, in the case of 46 or 76.60 per cent of the poems, the number of children who had not heard them before and did not like them was greater than the number of those who had heard them before and did not like them. This would indicate that familiarity might be a deciding factor in children's choices.

In the writer's opinion this indicates quite clearly that first grade children are not altogether consistent in their likes and dislikes, when they are presented to them after this fashion; but she does not care to say definitely that they are not consistent, for this evidence is not entirely convincing.

7. Do boys and girls differ in their choices? In the case of 33 poems (55 per cent), there were no significant differences in the percentages liking them. But in the case of 14 poems or 23.33 per cent their measure of popularity was determined by the girls' votes, and in the case of 13 poems or 21.67 per cent it was the boys' votes which determined their per cent of popularity. The girls' choices were: "Mary Had a Little Lamb" (Group IV), "Little Boy Blue" (IV), "Little Bo-peep" (IV), "The Queen of Hearts" (IV), "The Owl and the Pussy Cat" (V), "Sleep Baby Sleep" (I), "The Star" (III), "Animal Crackers" (III), "Please" (VI), "My Shadow" (III), "The Sugar Plum Tree" (VI), "Have You Watched the Fairies?" (VI), "Bed in Summer" (III), "What I Like" (III).

The boys preferred: "Grasshopper Green" (Group IV), "The Worm" (II),

"Taxicabs" (IV), "Little Turtle" (V), "Boats Sail on the Rivers" (II), "The Sleepy Song" (I), "Furry Bear" (V), "A Farmer Went Riding" (V), "The Wind" (I), "The New Moon" (VI), "The Bear Hunt" (III), "The Drum" (III), "The Elf and the Dormouse" (VI).

It seems hardly justifiable to say that first grade children differ materially in their choices. It will be noted that the girls' votes influenced the choice of four poems from group IV, five from group III, three from group VI, one from group I, and one from group V. The boys' votes influenced two from group IV, two from group III, two from group VI, two from group I, two from group II, and two from group V. If one is justified in drawing any conclusions, it would be that the boys like funny poems better than the girls do, while the girls may be a little more interested in those that express their own thoughts about things, but it certainly would take more evidence than is recorded here to make such a conclusion valid. In the case of the poems in group I, those chosen for their melody and rhythm, there was no difference; both boys and girls expressed their love of them.

There was no attempt in this particular experiment to find out why children like certain poems better than others or why they liked them at all. Although the writer feels convinced that first grade children are not able to say in most cases why they like certain poems, she expects to find out in future investigation, if possible, whether this conviction is true. It is a debatable point whether we have any right to expect children to tell why they like or do not like poems. If we search our own preferences and weigh them, we shall probably find that in a good many cases we do not know why, we just know that we do or do not, and if we continue our search consistently over a period of time we may find that we do not invariably like or dislike selections.

Our physical or mental state, the weather, our emotional setup at the time—any number of other conditions—may cause us to change our minds. Furthermore, the results of previous investigations show that first graders have given as their reasons—pretty, nice, sweet, funny—none of them of any particular significance to adults, but from the child's point of view quite sufficient. It may be discovered upon investigation that it is in this particular instance where teachers' influence is most felt.

### *Summary and Conclusions*

1. When 120 children voted on individual poems from a list of sixty chosen from widely varied sources: (a) More than 50 per cent of the children liked every poem. (b) Eighty per cent of them liked half of the poems.

2. When twenty-six first grade teachers were asked to say which of the poems in the first grade children would like and which they would not like, in the case of poems liked by 90 per cent of the children, the percentage of teachers who judged correctly ranged from 95.6 to 52.1. In the case of those poems falling in the fourth quartile of children's choices, the percentage of teachers who judged them ranged from 91.3 to 39.1 with the 91.3 per cent voting for the poem that stood next to the last in the list.

3. When poems in a group are paired with each other, in five of the six groups the poem that ranked highest is old, while in four of the six groups the poem that ranked last is modern. It is notable that the proportion of old and new ones in these two groups is fairly stable, more old poems ranking first, and more old ones ranking close to the last.

4. Funny poems as a group ranked first when paired with each other group, indicating to some extent that they are most popular with first graders, but this popu-

larity seems to be more general with the boys than with the girls, since it was the boys' votes that determined it. This conclusion is based upon insufficient evidence.

5. Children are reasonably consistent in their choices when allowances are made for change of mood, position of poems, and all other factors which might affect results. Further evidence is needed.

6. Familiarity sometimes does and sometimes does not have effect upon first grade children's choices. Probably, other things being equal, teachers' opinions that children like the poems with which they are familiar are as much to be depended upon as the findings herein recorded. More evidence is needed here.

7. From the evidence cited in these results one may conclude: (a) That children like poetry, which fact primary teachers have learned from experience. (b) That they like some old poems and some new poems regardless of source, quality, and authorship. (c) That they are fairly consistent in their choices if the term consistent is narrowly defined. (d) That they like funny poems better than others and that they like those dealing with their own philosophy and activities next best.

Upon the whole, children choose poems that have been considered by expert judgment to be good for primary children. The three poems, "The First Friend," "Kentucky Babe," "Nicholas Ned," which were expected to be too advanced for the children, proved to be quite popular with them. This fact seems to add some weight to the statements made by Miss Moore, Miss Dalglish, Miss Snedaker and others that children like poems that were not written especially for them. Even better evidence than any of these is the case of "A Frog Went A-Wooing." It is impossible, upon the basis of scientific evidence thus far produced, to define strictly the limits of the range of children's choices in poetry or

# The Case for Manuscript Writing

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THE GROWING interest in manuscript writing and its increasing use in schools are sources of satisfaction to those of us who have had opportunity to observe the advantages which it offers over the cursive form of writing.

Manuscript writing was introduced into the schools of this country from England about fifteen years ago. It was developed from the old manuscript type, but has been brought to closer resemblance to print, and it is more readily legible than the early style. Further, while it is so simplified that anyone can acquire skill in writing it, yet it may be so individualized and beautified as to be truly artistic.

Manuscript writing has been largely adopted in English schools. In the United States, though in general use in progressive private schools, it has still to win its way into many public school systems. Probably the chief reason for this is that the official sanction of boards of education having control of public schools is less readily obtained in matters affecting a radical change in procedure or curriculum. Whatever the reason, the situation with regard to the teaching of manuscript writing is this: it is being taught in the great majority of private schools while in the great majority of public schools the cursive form is still in use. It should be noted, however, that in many of the schools where cursive writing is the form enjoying official sanction, manuscript is taught to the children in the first and second grades. But, in the philosophy of these schools, manuscript is not conceived

to be *writing*, and so, beginning with the second or the third grade, the pupils are taught the cursive form.

This practice of changing to the cursive form even before the children have acquired skill in manuscript is open to serious objections. If manuscript is better for the beginning work of a child (and who doubts this?), and if it is a more legible and a more beautiful form of writing, why should he be required to change to a form less legible and less beautiful? We submit that there is no justifiable ground for such a procedure. Those who try to justify the change finally rest upon the claim that it is necessary to "appease the parents" who think that their children are not learning to *write*. In our experience with manuscript writing during a period of more than ten years in grades one through six in Lincoln School, Summit, New Jersey, we have found that parents generally reveal a good degree of common sense in the matter of judging manuscript writing on its merits. Of course, you have occasionally to make an exception where there is sore disappointment that no member of the family thus far can come up to grandfather's copper plate style of handwriting; but in those cases, you coyly intimate that probably grandfather's writing was unique even among his contemporaries.

In a recent article,<sup>1</sup> Carleton Washburne gives as his judgment that if a change is made from manuscript to cursive, it should not occur earlier than junior high school. He further adds that from

<sup>1</sup> *Elementary School Journal*, March 1937, Page 525.

his experience, he sees no good reason for changing at any time. With this judgment, our experience warrants complete agreement.

Any plan which aims to improve the standard of handwriting is of interest to everyone since all have experience with reading it at least; but teachers have particular need to know the merits of any proposed change to a different system. For this reason, we suggest that they verify these claims which are made by the advocates of manuscript writing.

1. It obviates the need for learning two forms of the alphabet when the child is first learning to read and write.

2. From the very beginning the pupil can write legibly; he does not have to go through a process of evolving something legible from the beginnings in the cursive writing, which most often are not even a good scrawl.

3. Manuscript writing can be learned in much shorter time than the cursive, and without any of the "manual toil" associated with most of the systems of script writing. Many children by the time they have completed the fourth grade have acquired a standard of writing which is legible, beautiful and individual. They can be excused from writing lessons as such, from then on their only further requirement being that they maintain this good standard which they have reached. We suggest that this question of the time involved in just acquiring writing as a tool be contrasted with the practice associated with the teaching of the cursive writing.

4. Good standards of arrangement of the written page are more satisfactorily acquired in manuscript writing.

5. Because they all do good manuscript, all children can experience the satisfaction resulting from good workmanship and an enhancement of a sense of self respect.

6. Because of its legibility and beauty, manuscript writing is immeasurably superior to the cursive form for both social and business purposes.

7. The commonly accepted condition that much of the handwriting of adults is illegible can be changed by the substitution of manuscript for cursive writing. No argument is necessary to establish the fact that this low standard of legibility is general. We are all familiar with the request, "Please print."

Upon the question of legibility Washburne says: "The advantage of manuscript from the standpoint of legibility has never been challenged by anyone who has any acquaintance with the product."

We have said nothing about the question frequently asked as to the relative speed with which manuscript can be done. One meets the individual who has had no first hand experience with the procedure or with the results in children's writing of manuscript, but who has an *idée fixe* that a practical degree of speed can only be acquired through the right skill in balancing movement on those forearm muscles. Well who would be so cruel as to disturb the perfect fit of an idea in such a comfortable habitat?

There have been a number of experiments to determine the speed with which manuscript can be done as compared with the cursive.<sup>2</sup> The results show that at some levels controlled groups of manuscript writers made better speed than corresponding controlled groups in cursive writing; also that when speeding up was made a special objective, marked gains were shown in both manuscript and cursive.

Presuming that a teacher is convinced of the advantages of manuscript writing, she will ask herself, "What preparation shall I need if I am to teach it? Will it be

<sup>2</sup> Washburne, Beatty, Conard, et al.



# Retardation in Reading and the Problem Boy in School

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THE CHICAGO Board of Education provides two special day schools, the Montefiore and Moseley, for maladjusted boys. These schools care for problem boys who are unadjusted in the regular schools. Many of the boys enrolled suffer because of delinquencies, psychopathic difficulties, emotional disturbances or problems of truancy and incorrigibility. Others are maladjusted to a less degree but are none the less unhappy in their school life. The ages of the boys vary from 10 to 17 years although most of them are between 12 and 16 years old, the median age being a little over 14 years. In grade placement all grades from the second through the tenth are represented, but most of the boys are in the sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth grades.

The boys present problems because of a wide range of causes and effects—physical handicaps, low mentality, uneven intellectual development especially retardation in reading, low economic standards of the home, poor social surroundings, foreign language handicaps, personality defects or some other maladjustment in school. The special schools serve the regular schools by offering opportunities to all maladjusted pupils who are not eligible to transfer to schools for physically handicapped or to prevocational schools.

Approximately 20 per cent of all boys who enter the Montefiore Special School have severe reading disabilities. Over 90 per cent of all problem boys studied in the Montefiore School are retarded one or more years below the level at which they

should read according to their chronological ages. Furthermore, approximately 66 per cent are retarded one or more years in reading below the level of their mental ages. Approximately 10 per cent are retarded in reading three or more years below the age grade of their arithmetic computation. These figures indicate that reading disability is an important factor in producing school maladjustment.

An analysis of the various types of difficulties shows that there are three distinct groups of problem cases who have failed in reading.

1. One group seems to have difficulty because of personality traits. This group is made up of boys with poor work habits who seem unable to master reading, although they often have skill in the more definite and easier supervised school tasks.

2. Another group of problem boys fails in reading because of physiological handicaps and among these are found boys with visual defects and those who are definitely mirror readers.

3. The third group are boys with low intelligence who have reached a mental age high enough to learn reading only after they have attained a physical and social maturity much higher than that of beginning readers. These boys are usually so thoroughly discouraged by years of failure that it is difficult to develop sufficient self-confidence when they finally come into a remedial reading class in a special school.

All cases of problem boys suspected of being retarded in reading are given complete tests before being enrolled in

remedial classes, and at intervals during the year retests are given to determine the progress made. The tests used include the Modern School Achievement Tests, Progressive Achievement Tests, Public School Attainment Scales, New Stanford Achievement Test, Metropolitan Achievement Tests, and for upper grade boys, the Unit Scales of Attainment in Reading. When any one or more of these tests indicate retardation in reading, then the Diagnostic Reading Examination by Marion Monroe is given. This examination includes Gray's Oral Reading Examination, Haggerty Reading Examination, Iota Word Test, and the Word Discrimination Test. On the basis of these tests individual and small group work is undertaken to overcome reading disabilities.

The tests reveal not only the types of reading difficulties encountered but also give indication of causes of reading disability. Many of the difficulties are caused by constitutional factors; but visual acuity, the only factor which is measured adequately by physical examinations, does not appear to be of major importance in accounting for reading disability among problem boys. It seems probable that such factors as muscular balance and binocular focusing are much more important, especially when accompanied by mental retardation. Discrimination of highly complex patterns seems to be an important source of reading disability. The problem boys are able to recognize letters, but are unable to discriminate words. The number of partially deaf children in the remedial reading classes in the special school is relatively insignificant. However, in the regular schools, this factor may have been of more importance than suspected, since the small reading classes and highly individualized type of work of the special school cares for this type of case automatically. There is a fairly large

group of the reading difficulty cases where there is failure to associate the auditory and visual symbols. These are related not only to the cases of individual speech defects, but also appear fairly common in children who come from non-English speaking homes and illiterate homes. There are many cases among the colored boys where the common pronunciation of a word is so far removed from the visual symbol that they have been unable to relate them, and the reading matter, although not removed from their experience, is utterly unintelligible to them. Approximately 8 per cent of the reading disability cases have pronounced speech defects. In certain cases the reading disability seems to be based on the speech defect, while in others there seems to be reason to regard them as both arising from a common cause.

Other reading disabilities seem to be caused by environmental factors such as foreign language or dialect speaking homes, broken school history, poor economic status of homes, and poor teaching methods. The broken school history is a factor of considerable importance with the rather dull boy who often has attended, on the average, more than three schools before coming to the special school and consequently has been subjected to frequent changes of teachers, texts, and methods. Since the Montefiore boys come from poor homes, their limited experience as a background for reading, and also the lack of reading material in their homes are no doubt responsible for much retardation in reading. Occasionally a boy has suffered from inexperienced and unskillful reading teaching. The difficulty seems to have been either the regimentation, the large classes, or the beginning of reading before reading readiness. There is also some reading difficulty because one phase of reading work has been overstressed, such

as silent reading, oral reading, speed of reading or comprehension in reading.

Generally speaking, in more than 50 per cent of the cases the reading disability seems to be related to, or complicated by dull mentality. In addition, a few also suffer from obvious physical defects. Although it is not assumed that either low mentality or physical defects necessarily caused reading disability, the remedial work must be organized with these factors in mind. In approximately 40 per cent of the cases the important factor in reading disability seemed to be related to personality factors such as emotional instability, and environmental influences such as foreign-speaking or dialect-using homes, and the results of poor teaching.

One can no more detect a particular type of reading defect characteristic of the problem boy than he can point to any other particular characteristic of the group. There is the same stumbling, halting, introduction of mannerisms to gain time in attacking a word, and the same poor eye movements that are common to all cases of reading difficulty. Tabulations of the vowel, consonant and word errors, omissions, repetitions, and substitutions have value in developing the remedial procedures needed in each individual case.

The work in remedial reading involves the use of a slow moving phonic method combined with a kinesthetic one. For purposes of instruction, the remedial reading cases are placed in small groups, the members of each group having similar difficulties and approximately the same degree of retardation. One group is composed of near normal, normal, and bright young boys who have either failed completely to learn to read or those whose reading age is far below that of their mental age. No one cause may be assigned for failure to master the funda-

mental reading skills but it appears that personality traits are primarily at fault. The child is often exceedingly restless, desires constant attention, or has similar unfortunate tendencies which even the most skillful teacher with a large group is unable to overcome. The small groups which are possible in a special school make the progress of this type of boy most gratifying.

The median chronological age for this group last year was 11 years 3 months, with a range from 8 years 7 months, to 12 years 7 months. The range in intelligence quotients was from 82 to 105 with a median of 92.5. The time spent in remedial reading class was approximately from 20 to 101 days, with an average time of 62 days.

At the beginning of the period, one third of the group had a reading grade of six years or less, depending upon the type of test used. The average discrepancy between mental and reading ages was 31 months. The reading ages averaged 25 months below the arithmetic computation.

In this period of 62 days a remarkable gain of 11 months was made in paragraph meaning. In word meaning the gain was a little less than 9 months. It appears that the wide difference between the mental age and reading age, the youth of the pupils (which meant that poor habits of work were not well fixed), and the relative high intelligence of the pupils made this group show by far the best progress.

The second group, which is not the classification for teaching but diagnostic purposes, makes up a smaller percentage of the remedial reading cases in the Montefiore School than the other two. In this group, the difficulty appears to rest on a physiological or neurological basis and covers those suffering from defective visual images and eye movements and especially mirror readers.

In this group there was a range in chronological ages from 8 years 9 months, to 14 years 5 months, with a median of 11 years 4 months. The intelligence quotients ranged from 76 to 102 with a median of 86. The reading ages were from non-readers to the latter part of 1-B grade or 6 years 8 months. The time spent in the special reading classes varied from 18 days to 61 days with a median of 31 days. The reading ages were on the average of 34 months below the mental age, 15 months below the arithmetic computation and reasoning ages. It appears that the vision interfered with computation as well as reading, as it will be noted that there is a wide difference between mental and computation ages. Perhaps, due to the structural basis of the difficulty, the progress of this group was less marked than with the first group. However, when the intelligence is considered the results are most satisfactory.

In the period of approximately 31 class periods a progress of 3.2 months was made in paragraph meaning and 3.9 months in word meaning. The progress of the mirror readers was the highest.

Group three, which constitutes the largest number of reading disability cases, is composed of the older, duller boys who are thoroughly discouraged because of their repeated failure to learn to read. One of the greatest problems with this group is the restoration of their self-confidence and hope of learning to read. Many have substituted most undesirable forms of behavior to compensate for lack of educational achievements.

Last year this group varied in intelligence from an I.Q. of 55 to 79 with a median of 72. The chronological ages ranged from 12 years 7 months, to 15 years 10 months, with a median chronological age of 14 years 11 months. In reading age the group varied from non-readers to 9 years 7 months. Over 50 per

cent of this group came directly from special divisions in regular schools while many more had been in special rooms at some time.

The reading age of this group averaged 26 months below arithmetic computation, 13.5 months below arithmetic reasoning and almost 35 months or 3 years below their mental ages. In a period which averaged 44 days this slow group made an average gain of 1.3 months in paragraph meaning and 2.7 months in word meaning.

The above account indicates that remedial reading instruction will help to overcome some of the handicaps of problem boys, and will enable them to make progress in reading, the most fundamental of school subjects. More important, however, than the progress in reading is the changed attitude of the problem boy toward school when he realizes that he is learning to read. He ceases to play truant and instead becomes interested in his school work. Furthermore, when the problem boy gets a feeling of satisfaction from his school work he is less liable to go outside of school to win his success in anti-social and often delinquent behavior.

The sense of differences is strong in children and the source of much conflict when the differences are not in their favor. The ordinary classroom is organized often on a competitive basis that does not give a fair field to the child who is retarded in reading, and it seems quite logical that he should become indifferent to school and develop characteristics of truancy and poor behavior that make him a problem case. When the special school helps him overcome his reading handicap he often readily adjusts himself to school life and its restrictions, and in no small measure is remedial reading responsible for the excellent record for adjusting problem cases maintained by the Montefiore Special School.



# Periods of Awakening or Reading Readiness

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OUR PRACTICE of attempting to teach the slow pupils to read in each of the primary grades before they experience failure, has met with a fair amount of success. During the past four years twenty-nine of the thirty-five pupils who were taught accordingly were able to work successfully in a fourth grade that accommodated children who were one year below the grade norm. These pupils were of average intelligence and had no special handicaps that differed appreciably from average readers. This practice was unlike the traditional program only in two respects: (1) the percentage of promotions in the primary grades was much higher; (2) the instruction was primarily individualistic. We continue, however, to treat the child who appears destined not to read in the first grade as if we could make him. Our immediate problem is to study a group of children who have gone through the primary grades, for the purpose of securing facts for making a program that will more nearly fit the response that some slow children make to reading.

The group studied entered the first grade September 1933. The class had an enrollment of approximately thirty children at all times, but only twenty were present throughout the primary grades. The study is limited to these twenty pupils. The moving was confined primarily to the middle group of pupils who made from 1.5 to 1.9 progress in the first grade. Therefore, the group studied is abnormal, when compared with other groups in two respects; the median scores are not true and there are too few pupils

who began to progress rapidly in the second grade. The median intelligence quotient for these pupils as measured by the Pintner Cunningham Test in 1933 was 102.

The experience reading approach was used for the reason that it had proved to be as successful as other methods in teaching first grade children. Thirty charts were written about the experiences of the children between September and the middle of January. On the first of December the pupils who were able to read the charts rapidly were introduced to the book *Friends*. Of the 331 words in this book, 169 had been used in the charts. The less apt pupils began reading from the Elson primer in January. The children had been introduced through the use of the charts, to all of the 68 different words in this book, save 15. During the children's experience with basal books and charts they also used materials from the library table. A portion of the reading time was devoted to pupils' selecting books from this library collection for their enjoyment. There was a gradual growth from the sharing of pictures with others, to the reading of the script under the pictures. This type of reading was thought to be so profitable that the more advanced pupils ceased to read from the basal books after the middle of March. The less advanced group, while their progress was not auspicious at all, appeared also to do better with the individual reading which was used exclusively after they had finished with the Elson primer in April.

Table I shows that the group pro-

gressed slowly in the first grade with approximately two-thirds not arriving at grade standard by the end of the year. This proportion diminished to approximately 50% in the second grade. At the end of the third grade, the scores made upon the Metropolitan Achievement Test showed that there were only three chil-

consumed less of the teacher's time. Thus, in the first year, Case III was reduced in the last fifty days of the year to two minutes per day, while Case XVIII was increased to four minutes per day. A study of Table I will reveal that the time given to the child who did not read in grade one was much greater than that given to

TABLE I  
READING PROGRESS OF TWENTY CHILDREN THROUGH THE PRIMARY GRADES SHOWING  
ESTIMATED TEACHER MINUTES PER YEAR GIVEN TO EACH CHILD

<i>Cases</i>	<i>Grades—First</i>		<i>Second</i>		<i>Third</i>	
	<i>Gr. Score</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Gr. Score</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Gr. Score</i>	<i>Time</i>
I.	2.4	460	3.6	170	5.0	170
II.	2.3	460	3.4	340	5.1	170
III.	2.5	460	3.6	170	5.1	170
IV.	2.3	460	3.1	340	5.7	170
V.	2.3	460	3.1	340	5.5	170
VI.	2.5	460	3.4	340	5.0	170
VII.	2.0	460	3.2	340	5.6	170
VIII.	1.8	460	3.2	340	5.8	170
IX.	1.5	510	2.9	680	4.5	460
X.	1.4	560	2.6	680	3.5	850
XI.	1.4	510	2.0	680	3.4	460
XII.	1.4	510	2.0	680	3.7	460
XIII.	1.7	510	2.2	680	3.6	460
XIV.	1.1	560	1.7	680	4.2	850
XV.	1.4	560	1.7	680	3.2	850
XVI.	1.2	560	1.6	680	3.4	850
XVII.	1.3	560	1.9	680	4.2	850
XVIII.	1.1	560	1.4	680	4.2	850
XIX.	1.3	560	1.4	680	2.6	850
XX.	1.3	560	1.6	680	2.7	850

dren who were below the beginning third grade level. One of these was reading third grade books with a fair degree of ease.

Table I also gives a rough estimate of the expenditure of teacher time. It is based upon these facts: there were approximately thirty pupils enrolled in the class throughout the primary grades. Ninety minutes per day were devoted to reading. The average attendance was 170 days per year. If the teacher had equalized her time among the pupils, each child would have received 510 minutes per year. This was not done. As children became interested and independent, they

the child who met with success. The difference was even greater in the second and much greater in the third grade. There seems to be little reward for this great expenditure of time for some slow children in the first and second and even in the third grades. It is pretty difficult to see how children making three months' progress or less in the first grade would have suffered if in this grade they had not been given reading instruction. Indeed the same question might be raised regarding some children in grade two. Case XVI's five month progress in the first two years of school, certainly looks small when compared with the 19 months'

growth made in grade three. The total estimated teacher time spent in attempting to get Case XVI to read during the first two years was 1240 minutes; in grade three he was given 850 minutes, with the result that he grew three times as much as he did in the first two years of school. Would this boy have done just about as well in grade three if he had had no instruction in the first grade?

Before discussing this question further, there is another problem that should be faced. If these pupils had been given more time in the first grade, would they have made better progress? It is possible that more time and more drill would have made some difference. They were little above average pupils in intelligence, yet their median scores in the first and second years were below the norm. The original group was two points below the first and second grade norms. It was believed that if we had doubled the time given to primary reading our test results would have been higher. However, we did not care to impoverish our science, fine art, and social science program by giving too much time to reading.

There appeared to be a short period during which some children met with greater success in reading than they had previously enjoyed. We were able to locate this point through an examination of the notes made upon the group. These were made during each month. They consisted of test scores, the child's interest as determined by his voluntary use of books, the child's reading level, and his ability to grasp words. Cases I-VI had either arrived at this reading readiness stage when they entered school or it was gained before Christmas. Cases VII and VIII and IX began to read in the latter part of the first grade. These pupils are commonly characterized as those who will read regardless of method or efficiency of instruction. Table I shows that they each made a good growth during the first year.

Case IX made only a half year's growth. He did not arrive at the period of awakening until the last two months of school, which was too late to register a very high growth upon the tests.

In the second grade Cases X through XIII showed definite signs of reading readiness. Case X quickened his pace early enough to make a year's growth. But for the others it was a spurt that came too late to be recorded by the tests. In the fall of the next year, while they were not fully independent, they were gradually becoming so. Cases XI, XII, and XIII grew considerably more in the third grade than they did in the first and second grades.

Cases XIV through XVIII did not make one year's growth in reading during the first two years of school. In the third year they each grew from 1.3 to 2.5 grades. Their case studies are a revelation of the struggle made by teacher and parent to get the child to read. A large variety of methods and materials were used. The instruction was individualistic. Very often the records show without causes that are very clear, that the child began to read. To establish a great amount of causation between a period of rapid growth and books and methods used during that time, would be an aberration. Very often these methods and materials made little impression upon the child prior to this period. The reader will get a better idea from a summary of Case XVIII.

Case XVIII entered the first grade in 1933 with a mental age of 5-3 and an intelligence quotient of 96. He participated fully in the planning and constructing by the class. He contributed some to the building of the reading charts made between October and January, but he had no interest in reading them. Between January and June he read from books. He never read without being urged and his ability to retain words was almost nil.

The phonic instruction given him during the last two months of school was valueless. His reading grade score at the end of the year was 1.1. There was little change effected in the second grade. His interest was improved, but his ability to retain words was extremely poor. He was taught to guess at the meaning of the word and to turn to familiar materials for help. He ended the school year with a grade score of 1.4. In the summer the mother gave him frequent flash card drills upon words taken from a Ward Primer. A test in the fall revealed that he had learned sixty words during the summer, the majority of which he was unable to learn in the first two years. He showed powers of grasping and holding to words in October of his third year in school when he read *My Second Primer* of "The New Path to Reading," and *Peter and Peggy Primer*, that he did not possess in the first and second grades. During this time he was given phonetic instruction. He lacked interest. It was not until the end of November of his third year in school that he showed real enthusiasm and joy in reading. He began to read outside the reading period. Between December and February he read a number of first readers, and on the latter date, he began reading a second reader. He now made frequent visits to the library. In the latter part of March he read successfully the *Child Library Reader, Book III*. His Metropolitan Achievement grade score was 2.7 at the close of the third grade. His teacher estimated that his grade score was 3.0. The school cannot account for this boy's delay in learning to read; since the methods and materials did not vary considerably in the primary grades, it is difficult to account for this phenomenal growth in the third grade. There is evidence that a change in intelligence corresponded with this period of rapid growth, as revealed by the following test score:

Pintner Cunningham Intelligence Test—June 1934—I.Q. 92.

Detroit Primary Intelligence Test—January 1936—I.Q. 102.

Benet-Stanford Revision Intelligence Test—June 1936—I.Q. 112.

The school has had a number of similar changes in intelligence quotients without a corresponding change in work.

Cases XIX and XX never arrived at the reading readiness period in the primary grades. They scored 2.6 and 2.7 respectively upon the Metropolitan Achievement Test at the end of the third grade. Very little of this was gained by relaxing into and enjoying reading as was done by the other eighteen children. It is believed that these students will become good readers in their fourth year in school.

While we do not know a great deal about this period of awakening or reading readiness, as we have chosen to call it, it appears to have two attributes. These are, interest enough on the part of the child to turn to reading of his own volition, and mental powers of retaining word forms with a degree of effort that is not too discouraging. One of these, either interest or power of retaining words, is not sufficient.

Cases XIII and XVII were interested in reading in the first grade, but they were unable to retain the words that they were using. On the other hand, Case XIX's deficiency in the third grade was not lack of vocabulary nor powers to add to his knowledge. The Metropolitan Achievement Test which was given him in June 1936, showed that he had about as broad a vocabulary as Case XVIII. But there was a great deal of difference between these two boys. Case XVIII was a voracious reader at the end of the third grade. He used his free periods for reading. He was quite independent in his search for the meaning of new words. Case XIX never read except when the teacher was beside him and then he had



difficulty with an easy second reader.

As illustrated by the above cases, there are no data in this study to support a contention that children cannot read before this period is reached. Indeed, some make as much as a year's growth without what we are terming reading readiness. It would seem that until a child has reading readiness, that learning to read is a laborious task, and so being, there is danger of building an aversion for this skill. It is likely that one would find it difficult to discover the period of reading readiness in classrooms with an extra large enrollment, and with a very formal reading program. It would probably be true that in such a situation there would not be much individual attention, there would be no great emphasis placed upon voluntary reading, and there would be a sparsity of materials.

Further, there is no contention, once this period has been reached, that all children will require the same amount of instruction. Cases XIV and XVIII began reading in the third grade. Case XIV's slowness we believe was due to health; while Case XVIII's deficiency seemed to lie in the fact that in the first and second grade he did not have the mental powers. There was a great deal of difference in the nature of these two children which is not revealed by intelligence tests. It is our opinion that Case XVIII will need almost twice as much guidance as will Case

XIV, in the intermediate grades.

Hobson's explanation of the sudden growth that sometimes takes place in reading in the latter part of the first grade, is that progress has been steadier than it appears, "but that lack of social adjustment and acclimation to the school situation has kept the child from being able to give evidence of what he has learned."<sup>1</sup> This explanation is plausible. However, one might justifiably question the value of the subtle forces that are working within a child, when it takes five times as long to produce an observable unit of growth before the period of awakening as it does afterwards. Would it not be better to delay reading in the first grade for those children who have to be pulled into the reading process and who find it very difficult to retain word forms? The answer to this question must obviously be left to another study. Preceding this an instrument or a technique for detecting the slow child must be devised. If other groups are similar to this one, then such factors as mental age, health (condition of tonsils, teeth, adenoids), social and economic status of home (determined by a questionnaire made by the school), will play a part, and a closer check with finer instruments might prove that a combination of these states would have a strong bearing upon reading readiness.

<sup>1</sup> Hobson, James R. "Reducing First Grade Failures," the *Elementary School Journal*, Vol. XXXVII, p. 30.

### THE CASE FOR MANUSCRIPT WRITING

(Continued from page 178)

necessary for me to take a course in manuscript writing?" We can assure her that with the aid of teachers' manuals that are available, she can confidently undertake a venture which in satisfaction to herself and in benefit to her pupils, will bring

returns many fold. Several book companies publish teachers' manuals on manuscript writing, as well as series of books for pupils. Scribners, Ginn and Company, and the A. N. Palmer Company publish this manuscript writing teaching material.

## CHILDREN'S CHOICES IN POETRY

(Continued from page 176)

their reasons for those choices. Further study may justify more definite conclusions.

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## LET US TALK TOGETHER

(Continued from page 160)

ture's painting, caught from the most beautiful of the continents, and echoes from the noise of American winds and waters, they set the blood of eager young folk to singing in their veins.

Sometimes, though, I ponder on what my literary career might have been had that first lesson in technique not turned me away forever from a style of writing which only I, not anyone else, could un-

derstand. Will the intellectuals come back now with their cups and cookies and help me brood on a momentous query? If I had gone on using words for their shapes or sounds, indifferent to their meanings, would I and not some other have founded the "Obscure" School of writers so semi-flourishing in our day? Was that six-year-old under the balm-of-Gilead tree a wilderness harbinger of Gertrude Stein?

# Principles of Method in Elementary English Composition\*

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(Continued from March)

## I. POINT OF VIEW

The statement of principles reflecting point of view in the teaching of elementary school English composition depends almost entirely upon theoretical considerations. Naturally there is relatively little research in point of view. Yet the establishment of an acceptable point of view is so important to the teacher of English that it can not fail to receive consideration. To the writer certain of the following principles represent almost self-evident truths. While they may not be exactly axiomatic, they seem quite apparent. Yet they are not readily proved, nor are they responsive to research procedures. Wherever adequate authority exists within the knowledge of the writer this evidence or authority is given; otherwise the statement may be given without supporting evidence in the discussion.

### A. Point of view reveals itself in the definition of objectives.

The curriculum in elementary school English is definitely affected by the philosophical and sociological points of view which are accepted as underlying effective instruction. If the disciplinary function of education is accepted, instruction on the formal aspects of the subject is emphasized. When cultural outcomes come to be emphasized, the literary phases of the language are stressed. As functional outcomes receive emphasis, instructional methods and materials become more func-

tional. Attempts to apply the social utility point of view in curriculum construction in English have ended with widely different outcomes (14, 34, 95, 114, 127).<sup>1</sup> For example, Searson (127) surveyed more than seven thousand adults for the purpose of discovering what relative demands the community makes on English abilities at different occupational levels. The desired outcomes were stated in terms of general abilities required to produce certain desired results, as "ability to close a deal, to direct men, to explain how things are done," etc. Charters (34), Kirby (98), Wilson (159), and many others applied the same general idea of learning about language practices from an analysis of the activities of daily life and produced extensive lists of common errors as the objectives of instruction. In the first case the objectives were quite general; in the latter cases the resulting emphasis was heavily upon the remedial and corrective aspects of instruction. Later Johnson (95), using a method of introspectional analysis, secured from a group of more than 200 women (one hundred women students and their mothers) a list of activities in their use of the mother tongue, "what had actually been performed or would have been performed if the individual had been capable of doing so." These lists were then classified into nine major types of expressional needs called "functional centers."

The current beliefs that learning to ex-

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<sup>1</sup> Parenthetical numbers refer to studies listed in the bibliography which appeared in the March number.

press oneself is an individual matter, that the essential skills are habits acquired in accordance with certain laws of learning, that the child learns to express himself by doing so, not by learning rules about it or by reading the products of others, that he masters skills more readily when they are brought into play in reasonably life-like situations are only a few practical examples of the ways in which point of view affects the curriculum and classroom practice.

**B. Objectives of instruction in language require further specification and objectification.**

Recent developments in the English curriculum have tended to make the statements of outcomes and skills much more specific and objective. The Curriculum Commission of the National Council of Teachers of English presented a carefully formulated statement of strands of abilities in the creative, communicative, and corrective phases of English instruction (78). Newer courses of study and textbooks include much material indicative of a recognition of the need for the further specification of skills. Much more needs to be done along these lines in the more exact determination of the particular skills which appear to carry the burden of social usage in language. For example, a study by Bontrager (16) resulted in an extensive analysis of the possible variations in learning situations involved in certain selected punctuation rules. Obviously not all of these variations are of equal importance to the child or to the adult. Some unquestionably carry much more of the social burden in written communication than do others. These important variations of the skills should be identified through the analysis of extensive samplings of the writings of adults and children (61). Similar types of analysis must be made in other mechani-

cal areas of language skills before the language curriculum can be evaluated on a social basis.

**C. Modern statements of language objectives emphasize the social utility point of view.**

It is generally believed today that the function of the school is to provide experience for the child which will enable him to live more effectively in the world of which he is now and will ultimately be a part (30). This suggests that the place to secure suggestions and instructional materials to provide these experiences for the child is largely in the world of the present day adult. The studies of objectives of instruction in English have generally assumed a utilitarian point of view (34, 47, 62, 86, 95, 159). However, in many of these studies the objectives appear to have been evaluated in terms of what selected groups of supposedly qualified persons have thought were important rather than in terms of what they themselves utilize in their daily life. For example, Bobbitt (14) secured a weighted list of objectives based upon the opinions of teachers in Los Angeles. Searson (127) asked adult opinions on the exact demands which society makes of English abilities. Pendleton (114) secured more than 1500 statements of aims of instruction in English and submitted them to English teachers for evaluation. Zook (163) checked objectives as stated in courses of study. Smith (133) analyzed the aims of teaching composition from a large number of high school courses of study selected from cities in thirty-five states in connection with the National Survey of Secondary School English. Each of these investigations has produced lists of apparently desirable outcomes but each quite different in its approach and its resultant emphasis.

Somewhat in contrast with these pro-



cedures is the more modern method of analyzing the language activities of adults and of children to discover the abilities which really function in life situations. The English Club of Greater Chicago (136) asked 346 senior high school pupils to mark checklists of common English skills. From this investigation the writing of friendly letters appears to be the most common out-of-school use of written English. McKee (107) compiled the vocabulary used by children in theme writing. Fitzgerald (47) analyzed more than 3000 letters written by children in an attempt to discover differences in content, form, and stimulus. Thorndike (146), Horn (86), Gates (54), and many others have made extensive investigations in the reading and spelling vocabularies of adults and children. The studies of Cesander (32), Cockrill (36), Hamilton (75), and the extensive analysis under way in the University of Iowa Language Laboratory (62) are examples of specific attempts to apply the social utility principle to the analysis of language abilities.

#### **D. Language usages are in a constant state of modification.**

The characteristic which distinguishes a live language from a dead language is the fact that the former is responsive to the demands of the current social conditions. That English is distinctly a live language is shown by the fact that it is in a constant state of change. New modes of expression are picked up and others are discarded with rather startling rapidity (116). An analysis of vocabulary changes alone indicates that during a single decade many words and expressions formerly unknown are introduced into good usage, and many acceptable current expressions may in the next decade become obsolete (86). Pooley (116) has shown for certain expressions the rapidity with which this change takes place. Leonard

and Moffet (102) studied the "use and non-use by cultivated persons of a large number of expressions usually condemned in English textbooks and classes." Of more than one hundred expressions commonly condemned by grammarians, forty-five were classed as cultivated English by 75 per cent or more of a jury of linguists. The investigators found that these accepted usages are confirmed in the latest authoritative dictionaries. One jury of fifty members of the National Council of Teachers of English passed judgment on these expressions and classified all but ten as acceptable.

The importance of the recognition of this principle lies in the fact that the English curriculum itself must keep pace with these modifications in usage. Moreover, some care must be taken to see that change is *improvement* and not *deterioration* in the language usages themselves.

#### **E. A cross section of current usage does not in itself constitute an adequate basis for the language curriculum.**

The uncritical application of the social utility point of view to the development of the English curriculum results in the general lowering of the plane of language usage. Useful as are such studies as those of Leonard and Moffett (102) and Leonard's *Current English Usage* (100), they tend to encourage a letting down of the standards of usage. Any procedure which depends entirely upon the reactions of typical adults for its evidence naturally tends to move in this direction. In English it is unfortunately true that most adults have a totally inadequate criterion of what constitutes correct usage. Thus a cross section of such usage may easily result in a serious lowering of standards. English is a live language and therefore must be in a state of constant adjustment to the demands of social usage but it is also true that there must be cer-

tain forces operating within the curriculum to prevent a too rapid decline of usage below the levels of social acceptability (62). Objective standards which represent relatively high levels of control over the usages must be provided. It is believed that the contributions of Pooley's *Handbook of English Usage* (116), *Wisconsin Report on Social Usage* (160), and Greene's *Criterion for the Course of Study in the Mechanics of Written Composition* (59), provide useful antidotes for this tendency.

**F. The application of the social utility point of view to the English curriculum leads to the recognition of a need for far greater emphasis on oral language skills.**

The studies of curricular content and of time distribution in the elementary and secondary school fields reveals with startling clarity the discrepancy between the social demands on oral language abilities and instructional emphasis given in the schools. Estimates indicate from 90 to 94 per cent of the language activity of the typical adult utilizes oral language abilities (5). New stimulus to the development of oral language emphasis in the curriculum has recently been given through the development of portable recording equipment which makes it possible to secure accurate and verbatim records of the various types of oral language activities (11, 64). Interesting results in this field have been produced in numerous centers. Greet (68) has secured interesting and valuable recordings of colloquial English. Many investigators interested in the speech aspects of English have also done creditable work in this field. In the University of Iowa Language Laboratory many hundreds of thousands of words of oral language have been recorded and analyzed for curriculum purposes (58, 99, 110). These records are proving to be very useful in determining

the types of things children talk about, the characteristics of the sentences they use, the extent and type of vocabulary used, the actual language usages employed, as well as many other phases of oral language abilities. Work of this general character should practically guarantee that the language curriculum of the future will provide adequate opportunity for pupil experiences with those types of language forms which the children themselves attempt to utilize.

## **II. CURRICULUM CONTENT AND PLACEMENT**

The principles included in this section deal with some specific characteristics of the curriculum, the content of the curriculum in English as representing the tangible expression of instructional objectives, and the grade placement of units of subject matter for instructional purposes.

**A. The school curriculum is constantly out of adjustment with its environment.**

This statement is based on the observation that social demands on the individual change rapidly while the content of the curriculum possesses an inertia which makes it impossible for it to change as rapidly as do the demands of society. This lack of adjustment operates in two directions. The first of these results in retaining in the curriculum much that is obsolete. The second is the failure of the curriculum to keep up with the changing demands of society and to anticipate these new needs (76). The curriculum worker wages a continuous struggle against the force of educational inertia which tends to retain old content and practices and to prevent the entry of the new.

**B. Text books and current courses of study disagree widely as to instructional emphasis and content.**

Numerous analyses of text book and

curricular content indicate much emphasis on language and grammar skills which are no longer needed or are infrequently required by the demands of modern life or by the usages of cultivated and educated citizens (67, 74). The effect of this situation is revealed in the confusion created in the minds of students moving from school to school or from one text book to another.

**C. Drill books and tests in English emphasize widely different drill content.**

Two studies, one an analysis of certain standardized language tests (25), the other an analysis of the drill content of practice exercises in language (39), afford the basis for this statement. The major contribution of these studies is the evidence they offer on the overlap in test items and drill items. It has been generally accepted that in a practical supervisory program based on the use of drill materials and tests, there should be a high degree of similarity between the skills tested and those on which corrective practice is provided. The data indicate a fairly close agreement as to the relative drill emphasis given to the various parts of speech. However, this similar emphasis does not mean at all that the same skills or the same items are receiving the emphasis. Many of the word forms used in both the test and drill materials appear only once. In fact, more than one-half of the forms used for testing purposes appear only once in a total of fifteen language tests. More than one-third of the forms used for drill purposes in eighteen drill exercises appear only once in the drill books. Thus there is not only the inadequate overlapping of drill emphasis but there is the more seri-

ous problem of the totally inadequate opportunity for learning provided in the practice exercises. It can scarcely be expected that one or two or even three practices on a difficult word form or skill is adequate to fix it permanently. Obviously there is need for much more research designed to bring about a closer co-ordination of test and drill materials in this field.

**D. Correlation of English skills with content subject matter provides the proper basis and motivation for activity.**

This statement is based partly on common sense reasoning and partly on implied evidence from the field of silent reading. The study skills involved in silent reading are developed and utilized most effectively when exercised on factual material in itself interesting or important to the student (87). Language skills have no foundation of their own but rest upon other subject matter for their development and use. Language is not a subject-matter field but a highly interwoven fabric of skills which are perfected and used in dealing with other subject-matter fields (108).

The correlation of English skills with subject-matter content for instructional purposes makes it more likely that the skills will be introduced and used in reasonably life-like situations. Motivation is greater and learning is more effective when the learner feels that the situation is real (155). Letter-writing may be taught in isolation or may be introduced purely on the basis of its intrinsic value, but it is more effective when it is made to function in the individual's own activities (106).

(To be continued)

# Editorial

## What Is Poetry?

SOME of the data presented by Miss Bradshaw in her paper, "Children's Choices in Poetry in the First Grade," tease a reader into speculation. Of 60 poems selected from such respectable sources as school readers, courses of study, anthologies, and research studies, teachers condemned 41 as not poetry. These 41 included the delectable childhood classics, "A Frog Went a-Wooing," "The Owl and the Pussy Cat," and "The Sugar Plum Tree." And the 19 poems against which no teacher raised objection, were equally surprising.

Miss Bradshaw would insist, no doubt, that her cases were too few to warrant conclusions, but she would not likely deny us the pleasure of speculating. Just what do these condemnatory asterisks in Table I (page 171) signify? That teachers are lacking in a sense of humor? Not necessarily, for although "Nicholas Ned" and "The Three Foxes" are thought unpoetic, Bangs' "The Little Elf" and Lindsay's "The Little Turtle" both pass. Do the rather wholesale condemnations imply that the teachers are indifferent to literature? We have no way of knowing, but the fact that the teachers co-operated in this study would indicate an unusual interest in the teaching of poetry. Perhaps this turning down of thumbs indicates contempt bred of weary association with the verses. But no, the teachers have refused the title "poem" to the modern verses not often taught, as well as the old familiar poems that have been appearing in school books for years.

One thing is clear: Children showed much livelier enthusiasm for all poetry than did teachers. They were surer of

what they liked. There were six poems liked by more than 91% of the children; there were only two poems liked by more than 91% of the teachers ("The Little Elf" and "My Shadow"). "Little Bo-Peep" was joyously supported by 96.57% of the children; only 66.9% of the teachers approved it, and some of them objected to calling it a poem.

This tempered judgment; this unwillingness to be too enthusiastic about anything, this critical attitude, are all the traits of cultured adults. But the number and variety of the verses to which some of the teachers would refuse the term "poem" seems to indicate also timidity—a distrust of one's own taste. The poems that go unquestioned are mostly those that have been accepted and taught for years. The strong folk-flavor of Mother Goose, the bold fancy of "The Moon's the North Wind's Cooky," and the delicious rhythms of "The Owl and the Pussy Cat" seem to puzzle them. Teachers may enjoy them, but, they ask, are they really poetry?

Miss Bradshaw's first table shows that teachers' tastes have little influence on those of children. This is disconcerting. It raises the question, what difference does it make, then, whether teachers recognize true poetry or not? Until strong contradictory evidence is presented, the answer is, none to the pupil. But to the teacher of English the difference between timid distrust of the unfamiliar, and the appraisal and enjoyment of humor, rhythm, fancy, means a good deal. It means, in fact, the difference between enjoying teaching a lesson and doing a routine duty.



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